

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 AID-05 FBO-02 OPR-02 OC-06 CCO-00

PER-01 A-01 SY-05 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 /051 W

----- 085150

R 110956Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6855

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMCONSUL UDORN

CINCPAC

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE VIENTIANE 1927

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. N/A

TAGS: AEMR, ECRE, LA

SUBJECT: FLOOD DANGER IN VIENTIANE

SUMMARY: THE DANGER OF FLOODING IN VIENTIANE IS EXPECTED TO BE ACUTE DURING THE LAST TWO WEEKS OF AUGUST AND THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF SEPTEMBER.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS CLAIM TO HAVE ADEQUATELY PREPARED FOR THE SEASONAL RISE OF MEKONG BUT THERE APPEAR TO BE DEFICIENCIES IN THE DIKE SYSTEM. END SUMMARY.

1. KETSADONG DETVONGSA, SPOKESMAN FOR THE URBAN WORKS COMMITTEE FOR THE PREFECTURE OF VIENTIANE, ON AUGUST 11 TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE EXPECTED THE MEKONG TO REACH THE SAME FLOOD LEVEL REGISTERED IN THE DISASTROUS 1966 VIENTIANE FLOODS.

2. KETSADONG DETAILED FLOOD PROTECTION MEASURES ALREADY TAKEN BY THE COMMITTEE AND EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT NEITHER THE CITY OF VIENTIANE NOR ITS WAT TAY AIRPORT COULD EXPERIENCE

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FLOODING THIS YEAR AS THEY HAD IN BOTH 1966 AND 1971.

3. HE EXPLAINED THAT THE ORIGINAL 12 METER DIKES HAD BEEN HEIGHTENED TO 13 TO 13.7 METERS AND NOTED THAT FLOOD CONTROL CANALS AND GATES ARE IN GOOD SHAPE.

4. THE EMBASSY'S ENGINEER HAS EXAMINED THE DIKE SYSTEM AT VARIOUS POINTS, HOWEVER, AND REPORTS THAT THE ADDITIONAL 1 TO 1.7 METERS OF DIRT NEWLY ADDED TO THE OLD DIKES HAS BEEN POORLY COMPACTED. HE WARNS THAT THE NEW UPPER PORTION OF THE DIKES WILL PROBABLY DISINTEGRATE IF THE MEKONG CRESTS ABOVE 12 METERS AND THE CURRENT CONTINUES TO BE RAPID AS IT IS AT PRESENT. IN THE PAST, HOWEVER, THE CURRENT HAS NORMALLY SLOWED DOWN WHEN THE WATER LEVEL PEAKED.

5. THE ONLY MISSION PROPERTY WHICH APPEARS TO BE VULNERABLE TO FLOODING IS THE EMBASSY CHANCERY AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLEX, BOTH OF WHICH ARE SURROUNDED BY A 1 METER WALL. BROAD GATE ENTRANCES TO BOTH WOULD REQUIRE SANDBAGGING. THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLEX AREA CAN BE PUMPED OUT, BUT IT WOULD NOT BE FEASIBLE TO DO SO IN THE CHANCERY AREA BECAUSE OF INADEQUATE DRAINAGE.

6. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF, KETSADONG NOTED ABSENCE OF SANDBAGS IN VIENTIANE.

7. GSO IS MONITORING RIVER LEVELS IN THE VIENTIANE AREA AND IS MONITORING GOVERNMENT BULLETINS OF RIVER LEVELS AT OTHER POINTS ALONG THE MEKONG. THE EMBASSY IS EXPLORING POSSIBILITY OF PROCURING SANDBAGS AND PUMPING EQUIPMENT.
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